

## A Litmus Test for European Integration Theories: Explaining Crises and Comparing Regionalisms

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# A Litmus Test for European Integration Theories: Explaining Crises and Comparing Regionalisms

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Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse

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# A LITMUS TEST FOR EUROPEAN INTEGRATION THEORIES:

## EXPLAINING CRISES AND COMPARING REGIONALISMS

Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse

### Abstract

This paper deals with two litmus tests for theories of European integration. The first part asks, how and to what extent various approaches can explain the contemporary crises of European integration. It thereby tackles the question whether European integration theories might have biased EU scholars towards ignoring evidence for (dis-)integration. While being more optimistic about the state of the Union than many EU scholars are, the paper argues for a more differentiated conceptualization of integration as a continuous variable that takes disintegration rather than stagnation or no integration as the opposite value of integration. The second part of the paper asks to what extent European integration theories are able to shed light on experiences with regionalism across the globe. It argues that they do provide plausible accounts for the emergence of regionalism around the world. Comparing regions points to important scope conditions under which European integration theories operate. When it comes to outcomes, however, they need to be complemented by explanations emphasizing diffusion to explain why and when states are more inclined to pool and delegate sovereignty in some regions than in others.

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Image Credit: Martin Funck

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Image Credit: Martin Funck

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## 1. The EU between Integration and Disintegration

### 1.1 *Is the EU Dis-Integrating?*

European integration theories want to explain why states seek to integrate rather than why they fail to do so. This has to do with their origins as International Relations theories. If “cooperation under anarchy” (Oye 1986) is already puzzling, integration presents even more of an anomaly in an international system that lacks a central enforcement power to solve collective action problems. There are a multitude of ways to conceptualize regional integration. Irrespective of whether focusing on the economic, political, or social dimension, most typologies distinguish between the issue areas, on which regional institutions have obtained the authority to decide, on the one hand, and the degree to which exercising regional authority interferes with state sovereignty over these issues, on the other (Börzel 2013; Lenz/Marks 2016). The dependent variable can take several values, which can be placed on a continuum whose opposite ends seem to be integration vs. no integration, stagnation, or “encapsulation” (Schmitter 1970a) rather than disintegration. Likewise, changes usually are analyzed in terms of more integration vs. stagnation. Moreover, (more) integration tends to be associated with supranationalism whereas intergovernmentalism stands for no or limited integration (Börzel 2013). The possibility of relapse or break-up is hardly systematically considered. This is less a deficiency of integration theories as such. Neo-functionalism considers spill-backs with member states withdrawing from previous commitments (Niemann et al. forthcoming; cf. Schmitter 1970b; Schmitter/Lefkofridi 2016). Likewise, liberal intergovernmentalism discusses the possibility of member state governments as the “masters of the treaties” curbing the power of the European Court of Justice in case of serious agency slippage. National governments can also work around supranational institutions, such as majority voting, by using informal norms, opt-out clauses, and multi-track arrangements (Moravcsik/Schimmelfennig forthcoming; cf. Garrett et al. 1998; Kleine 2013).

The problem with theorizing disintegration seems to be that our universe of cases has lacked serious instances of disintegration so far. Brexit could be one (Lequesne forthcoming). Alternatively, we might have simply missed them because we falsely coded the failure of the European Defense Community in 1954 or the Eurosklerosis (sic) of the 1970s as mere stagnation of European integration rather than disintegration. This is different with the “polycrisis”<sup>1</sup> the EU has been experiencing over the past decade. There is no denial that the situation has been serious, maybe even critical. Yet, for many EU scholars it seems to be a forgone conclusion that this time, the EU is doomed. In a forthcoming debate section with the *Journal of European Public Policy* the editors asked the contributors to a debate section “to re-evaluate our shared premise: that the EU, despite its inefficiencies and deficits, is here to stay” (Rittberger/Blauberger 2018: 436). The contributors followed the call and discussed the possibility of “destruction”, “termination”, “collapse”, “disintegration”, and a “cycle of authoritarianism” (Hodson/Puetter 2018; Jones 2018; Kreuder-Sonnen 2018). Their concerns are indicative of a certain mood of gloom and doom among EU scholars: the EU has largely failed to prevent the unfolding “polycrisis” and mitigate the hardship inflicted on people inside and outside its borders.

Rather than engaging in such “doom and gloom” scenarios, this takes a decidedly analytical stance. First,

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1 Speech by President Jean-Claude Juncker at the Annual General Meeting of the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises (SEV), Athens, 21 June 2016, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_SPEECH-16-2293\\_de.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-16-2293_de.htm); 31 October 2017.

we conceptualize integration as a continuous variable with two opposite extreme outcomes: full-scale integration vs. full-scale disintegration.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, changes in the dependent variable entail more, less, or no integration/stagnation. Second, we need empirical indicators for measuring (more) integration and disintegration. One of the earliest and most comprehensive endeavors in this regard was the work of Karl Deutsch. He defined international integration as the attainment of a “sense of community” and of institutions and mutual transactions strong enough to assure dependable expectations of “peaceful change” among a population of a given territory (Deutsch et al. 1957). Deutsch’s transactionalist theory denotes three major dimensions of integration: politics (institutions), economics (economic transactions/interdependence), and society (identity). While it is not always clear what is cause and what is effect, EU scholars have traced progress of integration along these three dimensions. Interdependence captures the economic transactions between states in terms of goods, capital, services, and labor. Institutions refer to the level and scope of EU competencies (Lindberg 1970) and the degree to which states pool and delegate sovereignty (Lenz/Marks 2016). Identity, finally, taps into the sense of belonging to the EU in terms of support for membership and the feeling European (Risse 2010). With much ‘stop-and-go’, European integration has progressed along all three dimensions over the past 65 years. If there was to be disintegration now, we should see a decline in economic transactions, a renationalization of EU competencies, and/or a weakening sense of community.

Not least thanks to the quantitative turn in EU studies, plenty of time series data are now available and allow for measuring changes towards more or less integration over time. Trade and capital flows within Europe dipped at the height of the financial crisis but quickly recovered.<sup>3</sup> So have, albeit more slowly, economic growth and employment. Support for EU membership and identification levels with Europe have been equally recovering even in the debtor countries (Börzel/Risse 2018). The permissive consensus is gone, but it had started to erode long before the current fling of crises hit the EU (Van der Eijk/Franklin 2004; Hooghe/Marks 2009). The EU’s attempts to stabilize the Euro zone resulted in a series of institutional reforms, including the Macro-Economic Imbalance Procedure, the European Fiscal Compact, the European Stability Mechanism, and the Banking Union. While not even touching the Treaties, these new institutions considerably strengthen the EU’s authority in the area of fiscal and economic policy, particularly by delegating competencies to the European Commission and the European Central Bank (Börzel 2016a; Schimmelfennig 2014). Similar attempts failed with regard to the migration crisis. The member states ultimately rejected proposals for a semi-automated relocation of refugees. Nor did they approve plans for repatriating illegally staying third country nationals. At the same time, the member states agreed on a whole set of joint measures aiming at “sharing the responsibility” (Council of the European Union 2015) for the refugees who had already entered the territory of the EU, on the one hand, and managing future migration flows, on the other. Core measures include the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), the transformation of FRONTEX into the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, resettlement agreements with Turkey and several other countries, and the approval of a European Union Agency for Asylum (Börzel 2016a). Likewise, the European Commission adopted a new framework to address systemic threats to the rule of law in Hungary and Poland in 2014, which is less cumbersome to activate since it does not need approval of the Council and the European Parliament (Kochenov/Pech 2016). Finally, the member states

2 The following draws on Börzel (2018).

3 Eurostat 2017: International Trade in Goods, in: [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/International\\_trade\\_in\\_goods](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/International_trade_in_goods); 18 November 2017.

have shown remarkable unity and resolve in the negotiations over BREXIT with the British government.

There seems to be little evidence for a dissolution or breakdown of economic ties, political institutions, and Europeanized identities. This is not to say that there are no signs of disintegration. However, they may concern dimensions of integration, the literature has neglected. If we do not find compelling evidence for disintegration, maybe our search has been tainted by theories that have missed important dimensions of our dependent variable beyond economic transactions, regional institution-building, and European identity. There must be a reason why EU scholars are worried about the future of European integration and the EU. Rather than interdependence, institutions, and identities, they should be concerned about discursive and behavioral practices that could turn into disintegration. Nationalist exclusionary discourses and non-compliance with existing (legal) commitments are not the same as disintegration. Yet, they may reinforce each other and eventually undermine “integration through law” when populist movements challenge its very legitimacy.

With the various crises unfolding, discourses about Europe and the EU have become increasingly nationalist and exclusionary (Wodak forthcoming). The recent electoral success of populist politicians that advocate an illiberal Europe of sovereign nation states, which is protectionist and anti-Islam, have the potential to undermine the liberal foundations of the European Union and its member states. So do the attempts of Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán and the Polish PiS government to control the media and the judiciary (Kelemen forthcoming). Yet, democratic backsliding in Hungary and Poland is not the same as authoritarian rule as we find in Belarus or Azerbaijan. Moreover, Emmanuel Macron demonstrated that the silent majority of Europeans, which public opinion surveys still find to adhere to liberal values, can be mobilized to win elections. At the same time, nationalist populism not only impedes national governments from agreeing on workable policies at the EU level but also undermines their compliance with already adopted EU laws and agreements. The failure to come up with common European solutions further fuels nationalist populism. The “politics of fear” (Wodak 2015), which centre-right parties increasingly have bought into, continues to undermine compliance with already existing EU law.

Practices that are not consistent with EU law do not necessarily undermine the functioning of the EU. In fact, a polity seeking to integrate 28 states, which are ever more heterogeneous, may need a certain amount of non-compliance or “institutionalized hypocrisy” (Iankova/Katzenstein 2003) to balance unity and diversity. Non-compliance, however, turns into a systemic risk of disintegration when member states refuse to incur compliance costs altogether contesting the authority of the Commission as the guardian of the treaty or the validity of EU law as such.

Compliance has become increasingly politicized. Nationalist and populist politicians do not only resent the Euro and Schengen. Viktor Orbán, Marine Le Pen, Jarosław Kaczyński, Alexander Gauland, Geert Wilders, or Nigel Farage deny the EU the authority to make and enforce rules on issues that interfere with national sovereignty. The politicization of the EU’s authority to set and enforce rules is likely to intensify if governments continue to mask distributional conflicts as regulatory problems, whose solutions lie with stricter rules and tougher enforcement instead of mutualizing the adjustment costs in the form of bailouts, euro bonds or fiscal equalization schemes. Non-compliance then becomes a way for member states to dodge adjustment costs, which regulatory policy, such as the austerity rules of the European Fiscal Compact or the principle of first contact of the Dublin regime, shifts to the implementation at the domestic level rather



than addressing them at the decision-making stage at the EU level (Börzel forthcoming).

In sum, measurements of integration and disintegration do not confirm the “doom and gloom” assessments, which appear to prevail in EU studies these days, but reveal a more differentiated picture. On the one hand, the EU reaction to the Euro and the sovereign debt crises in (mostly) Southern member states resulted in more rather than less integration including empowering the EU Commission as well as the European Central Bank (ECB). On the other hand, the refugee flows and the resulting migration crisis led to widespread non-compliance of member states with EU rules and regulations, even though the initial EU reaction was more rather than less integration. Yet, non-compliance is not the same as disintegration, even it might result in the latter over time. As to Brexit, the (likely) departure of one member state has not changed the course of integration among the remaining 27. On the contrary, the EU has stood firm with regard to the core principles of the single market and the Schengen agreements, as the “divorce” negotiations with the UK reveal.

What has changed, though, is the increasing politicization of EU politics in many member states, fostered by the rise of (mostly right-wing) populist movements and parties. These groups have started mobilizing anti-EU attitudes in many member states, which had been silenced by the political elites for years. It is too early to tell what the consequences for European integration will be.

How do the various theories of integration discussed in this paper explain the contemporary dynamics in the EU?

- Measurements of integration and disintegration do not support concerns about the EU’s fall or demise.
- The main challenge for the EU is the increasing politicization of EU politics, which undermines compliance with EU rules and regulations.

## *1.2 Theorizing Integration and Disintegration in the EU*

Not only is there a general sense that the EU may be disintegrating. Many EU scholars feel that that “existing theoretical arguments – transactionist, neofunctionalist, intergovernmentalist, institutionalist – are ill-equipped to go in reverse” (Jones 2018: 440). But are they? If theories can explain why European integration has moved forward, reversing their causal logic should be able to explain why it is not or may relapse. Yet, as argued above, no (further) integration is not the same as disintegration. Moreover, different European integration theories are far from failing when it comes to explaining crises and their outcomes. They certainly have limits, which, however can be overcome by combining different approaches (see e.g. Kelemen forthcoming; Niemann et al. forthcoming; Moravcsik/Schimmelfennig forthcoming; Börzel forthcoming and Risse forthcoming).

As to the Euro crisis, theories of fiscal federalism (Kelemen forthcoming) explain that federal systems with a common currency and single market face a moral hazard problem that can be dealt with either by applying strict “no bailout” clauses or by putting strong legal limits on state borrowing. The Maastricht Treaty attempted to do both, but when Greece almost defaulted, the Euro zone members decided to bail out the

country in exchange of putting judicially enforceable balanced budget requirements in place. As Kelemen argues (forthcoming), theories of fiscal federalism also explain why this strategy is unlikely to work.

Liberal intergovernmentalism adds to this an emphasis on the diverging economic policy preferences between Northern Europe with its export-led growth strategies, on the one hand, and Southern European demand-led growth policies, on the other hand (Moravcsik/Schimmelfennig forthcoming; also Schimmelfennig 2015). These divergences have been around for decades and have been papered over by the Maastricht Treaty establishing the single currency. When the exogenous shock hit the Euro zone in the late 2000s, hard intergovernmental negotiations ensued resembling a game of chicken and leading to a highly asymmetric bargain in favor of the more powerful Northern creditor states. While this might be the case, liberal intergovernmentalism has a hard time to account for the increased integration steps including the further empowerment of the European Commission and the extraordinary authority assumed by the independent European Central Bank (ECB) during the crisis (see Börzel/Risse 2018).

In contrast, neofunctionalism correctly predicts this push toward further integration during the Euro crisis and the policy entrepreneurship of the European Commission and the ECB toward further supranationalism (Niemann et al. forthcoming). However, as Niemann, Lefkofridi, and Schmitter argue, neofunctionalism would not have foreseen that the resulting politicization of EU affairs would turn against further integration as promoted by Eurosceptic movements and parties. Rather and according to neofunctionalism, politicization is supposed to lead to further integration.

Yet, both liberal intergovernmentalism and neofunctionalism, particularly as discussed by Niemann, Lefkofridi, and Schmitter (forthcoming; but see Haas 2001), are firmly embedded within a rational institutionalist framework. An alternative account of the Maastricht Treaty and the crises responses of the EU points to path-dependent processes and incremental changes as emphasized by historical institutionalism (Pollack forthcoming). From this perspective, the setup of the European Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) cannot be regarded as a rational response to some functional pressures, but as “inefficient” historical responses following previously enshrined scripts of European integration. The same holds true for the incremental and piecemeal responses to the “critical juncture” of the Euro crisis. Given this incremental path-dependency, Pollack is deeply skeptical that the EU responses to the crisis will be sufficient to restore the viability of the Euro zone (Pollack forthcoming).

In a similar vein, governance approaches (Börzel forthcoming) reveal that the equilibrium between intergovernmentalism and supranationalism that has been constitutive for the European Union from its very beginnings has not changed. The Euro crisis has strengthened both supranational centralization and intergovernmental coordination. Neither, however, is likely to tackle effectively the increasingly redistributive conflicts in the Eurozone pitching the Northern and Southern member states against each other.

Neither liberal intergovernmentalism nor neofunctionalism ultimately offer a good account for the origins of the diverging economic preferences of Northern European “creditor” and Southern European “debtor” countries, since both approaches tend to exogenize actors’ interests taking them for granted. The particular strength of critical political economy is to provide an explanation for these divergences (Apeldoorn/Horn forthcoming; see also Matthijs/Blyth 2015). As Apeldoorn and Horn argue, the European Economic and

Monetary Union (EMU) constitutes a particular manifestation of a neoliberal project for the EU. Moreover and from a feminist perspective, Galligan (forthcoming) highlights the gendered nature of the various neo-liberal policy prescription leading to the neglect of, e.g., female unemployment during the crisis. The Euro crisis itself exposed the internal contradictions of this project, namely the ever-increasing structural divergences and heterogeneities in the Euro zone. When the international economic and financial crisis hit the EU, these divergences were exposed leading to the Euro crisis. Critical political economists are deeply skeptical about the various measures adopted by EU institutions to mitigate the crisis (Apeldoorn/Horn forthcoming). Furthermore, these measures are likely to exacerbate further gender inequalities inside the EU (Galligan forthcoming).

With regard to the migration crisis, liberal intergovernmentalism posits rather stable state preferences in the EU with regard to controlling migration flows in light of substantial domestic opposition to large numbers of refugees and migrants (Moravcsik/Schimmelfennig forthcoming; see also Biermann et al. 2017). The position of the various governments is then determined by their status as “front line”, “transit,” or “destination” countries. The bargaining resulted in asymmetrical agreements with regard to border control (putting the “front line” states at a disadvantage), but not concerning the distribution of refugees given the divergence of preferences. Thus, liberal intergovernmentalism correctly explains why the migration crisis has led to stalemate and to increased non-compliance with previously agreed-upon rules and agreements. In contrast, neofunctionalism would have predicted further integration steps even in the migration crisis given the economic incentives not to put the Schengen agreements and a Europe of open borders into jeopardy (Börzel/Risse 2018). Besides, the demographic crisis in Europe should have led to a much more welcoming attitude towards migrants.

Identity politics explains to a large degree why the latter did not happen. Eurosceptic and (mostly right-wing) populist movements dominated the discourse on migrants (Wodak forthcoming) thereby tapping into and mobilizing exclusionary and nationalist identities among the European populace (Risse forthcoming; see also Börzel/Risse 2018). Thus, social constructivism and discourse theory explain where the (anti-migrant) preferences came from and became politically salient which liberal intergovernmentalism takes for granted. Governance approaches point to an important source of the increasing politicization not only of EU policies but also of the EU polity as such. The EU system of multilevel governance has emerged to make and regulate markets. The member states have refused to grant the EU much redistributive powers. Trying to tackle redistributive conflicts over the sharing of adjustment costs in the Euro crisis or the allocation of refugees in the migration crisis by regulatory governance fuels Euroscepticism and empowers nationalist populism. Both supranational centralization and intergovernmental coordination isolate controversial decisions from domestic politics by having them taken by independent regulatory agencies or heads of states behind closed doors (Börzel forthcoming).

In sum, the various theories of European integration offer various accounts of the Euro as well as the migration crises. Some of these accounts contradict each other. E.g., liberal intergovernmentalism emphasizes crisis bargains among EU member states (Moravcsik/Schimmelfennig forthcoming), while neofunctionalism highlights the agenda-setting roles followed by the further empowerment of supranational institutions (Niemann et al. forthcoming). In contrast to both, historical institutionalism emphasizes path dependencies and “inefficient histories” (Pollack forthcoming). Likewise, governance approaches see the important changes not so much in the constitutional equilibrium between intergovernmentalism and

supranationalism but the nature within the two logics of EU policy-making (Börzel forthcoming). Critical political economy focuses on the underlying material conditions to account for the crises (Apeldoorn and Horn forthcoming), while social constructivism, feminist as well as discourse theories point to social sense-making, interpretations, and (gender) identities as underlying the preferences of actors (Risse forthcoming; Galligan forthcoming and Wodak forthcoming).

At the same time, some of the arguments complement each other. Federalist theories, liberal intergovernmentalism, neofunctionalism, but also historical institutionalism and governance approaches emphasize the various bargaining processes at the intergovernmental and supranational levels (see various chapters in Wiener et al. forthcoming). Yet, these approaches mostly exogenize actors' interests and preferences which is the focus of social constructivism (identities, see Risse forthcoming), critical political economy (economic conditions, Apeldoorn/Horn forthcoming), feminist theory (Galligan forthcoming), and discourse approaches (Wodak forthcoming). As Legro has argued quite some time ago, theories accounting for the origins of preferences can be combined with theories explaining the negotiation processes in the "cooperation two step" (Legro 1996; see also the emphasis on the "mosaic" of integration theories in Diez/Wiener forthcoming; on the pitfalls of such bridge-building exercises see, however, Checkel 2013).

- Many theories of European integration have difficulties in accounting for the diverging outcomes of the EU's multiple outcomes.
- Endogenizing member state preferences by focusing on identities and discourses provides for a better understanding of the EU's crises and their outcomes.

## 2. Travelling beyond Europe: The Challenge of Comparative Regionalism

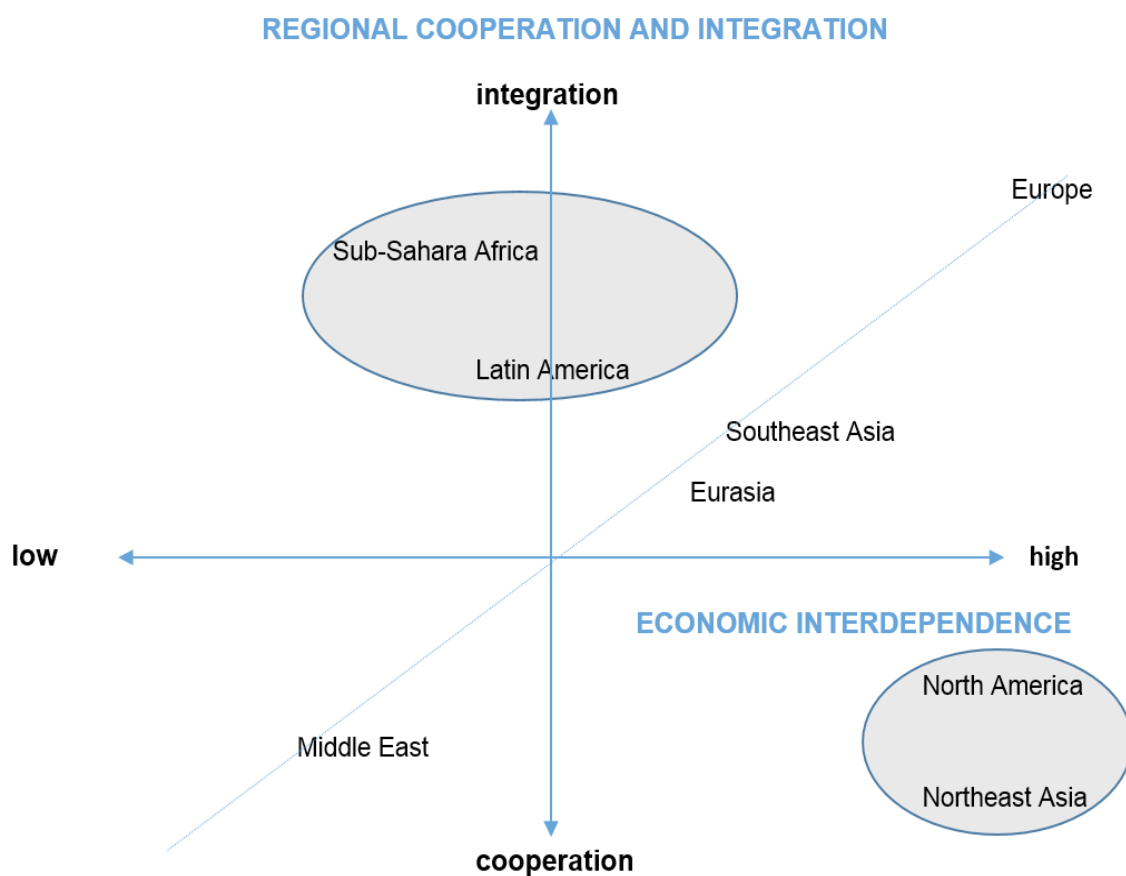
As argued above, theories of European integration are still in their "zone of comfort" when dealing with the various EU crises of the past decade. It is simply not true that these theories have little to contribute to the explanation of the crisis and the EU responses to it (as some have claimed with regard to processes of disintegration, see Rosamond 2016). Yet, European integration theories took off in Europe, where regionalism from the very beginning was meant to go beyond trade liberalization through inter-state bargains (Börzel 2013: 504-507). While initial attempts at theory building were not confined to Europe (Mitrany 1943; Hoffmann 1956; Haas 1964; Nye 1970; Schmitter 1970b), they got increasingly refined to accommodate the dynamics of the European integration process and its supranational outcomes. Integration became practically synonymous with European integration and the EU served as the yardstick for measuring regional integration in other parts of the world. Students of regionalism outside Europe felt that EU research held little on offer to them. Using European integration theories would amount to ethno-centrism imposing "Western" concepts, approaches and research agendas onto other regions and ignoring the distinct historical, cultural, social, political and economic context in which they emerged (Acharya 2016; Söderbaum 2016). The "comparative turn" in area studies in the early 2000s has helped overcome the divide between EU studies and research on regionalism in other parts of the world. The emerging field of comparative regionalism takes it as an empirical question how far European integration theories travel in explaining the

emergence of regionalism, its outcomes, and its effects in other parts of the world (Börzel/Risse 2016a).<sup>4</sup>

Given the specific historical context in which the project of European integration emerged, it is indeed not obvious that European integration theories have anything to say about the creation of regional organizations in other parts of the world, where states are not necessarily liberal democracies and advanced market economies. This ‘liberal’ bias appears to limit the applicability of liberal (sic!) intergovernmentalism (Moravcsik/Schimmelfennig forthcoming), neofunctionalism (Niemann et al. forthcoming), critical political economy approaches (Apeldoorn/Horn forthcoming), and normative theories (Bellamy/Lacey forthcoming) to the OECD world of industrialized liberal democracies.

In order to evaluate how standard theories of (European) integration travel to other world regions, we have mapped the various regional orders across the world using rather rough estimates of economic interdependence, on the one hand, and degrees of regional cooperation and integration, on the other. While the x-axis of Figure 1 maps degrees of economic interdependence (or regionalization), the y-axis distinguishes degrees of (intergovernmental) cooperation and (supranational) integration, i.e., the pooling and delegating of authority unto the regional level (on this distinction see Hooghe/Marks 2015). What does Figure 1 tell us?

Figure 1: Regional Cooperation and Integration



Source: Modified version of Figure 27.2 in Börzel and Risse (2016b: 629).

4 The following summarizes Börzel (2016b), Risse (2016), and Börzel/Risse (2016b).

First, Europe and the EU are on their own with both high degrees of economic interdependence and regional integration. Second, Southeast Asia, Eurasia (that is, Russia and the various successor states of the Soviet Union, see Hancock/Libman 2016), and the Middle East are roughly located on a diagonal line of more or less similar degrees of interdependence and regional cooperation/integration. Third, four world regions show rather counter-intuitive patterns. The Sub-Saharan Africa and the Latin American regions are characterized by low and medium degrees of economic interdependence coupled with comparatively high levels of regional integration including some supranational institutions (overviews in Bianculli 2016; Hartmann 2016). The opposite is true for both North America (the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA)) and Northeast Asia (China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan): very high degrees of economic interdependence coupled with mostly intergovernmental regional cooperation schemes. How do the theories of (European) integration fit with this overall picture?

Classical cooperation theories in international relations (see e.g. Keohane 1989; Keohane/Nye 1977) of which both liberal intergovernmentalism and neofunctionalism are derivatives (Moravcsik/Schimmelfennig as well as Niemann et al. forthcoming), posit that economic interdependence fosters cooperation and integration. The higher the degree of economic interdependence, the more we would expect regional integration so as to solve the likely conflicts, enable economic exchanges, and insure credible commitments. The four regions placed roughly on the diagonal line of Figure 1 appear to fit the bill – with Europe/the EU and the Middle East (Valbjorn 2016) on opposite ends and Southeast Asia (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), see Jetschke/Katada 2016) as well as Eurasia (Hancock/Libman 2016) in between. In other words, roughly half of the regional cooperation and integration schemes in the world can be accounted for by classical functional theories of integration. This is not too bad for theories originally developed to accounting for the very special circumstances of European integration.

But what about the remaining world regions? Let us start with Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa. These two world regions are characterized by comparatively low/medium levels of economic interdependence, but quite some degrees of political integration including supranational institutions (note that the African Union and other African regional organizations allow for military interventions in member states in cases of coup d'états and unconstitutional changes of governments, see Hartmann 2016). If we relax strong assumptions about economic interdependence and allow for other functional reasons to engage in cooperation, regional integration in both Latin America and Africa can actually be accounted for. Liberal intergovernmentalism, for instance, argues that national governments seek to isolate political decisions with redistributive consequences from particularistic domestic interests by transferring them to the EU level (Moravcsik/Schimmelfennig forthcoming; cf. Milward 1992). Such a political rationale may apply to regions that lack economic interdependence as a major driver for regionalism. African and Latin American leaders, democratic or not, have supported regional integration as a way to control, manage and prevent regional conflict, deal with non-traditional security threats or as a source of domestic power and consolidation of national sovereignty (Graham 2008; Caballero-Anthony 2008; Herbst 2007; Okolo 1985; Acharya 2011; Barnett/Solingen 2007). Weak states, in particular, have been inclined to engage in such “regime-boosting regionalism” (Söderbaum 2004) because they are more dependent on economic growth to forge domestic stability, tackle societal problems, and strengthen their international standing in terms of bargaining power and legitimacy (Clapham 1996). Moreover, non-state actors can more easily circumvent their governments in seeking transnational exchange (Bach 2005). Finally, regionalism has served as a tool for settling conflicts

and securing peace among (former) rival nations (Oelsner 2004; Acharya 2001; Francis 2006; Gruber 2000) and, more recently, for consolidating and promoting democracy in member states (Pevehouse 2005). What national governments lose in authority to regional institutions, they gain in legitimacy and problem-solving capacity, particularly since many societal problems and non-traditional security threats, such as environmental pollution, pandemics, drug trafficking or migration, are no longer confined to the boundaries of the nation-state (cf. Börzel/van Hüllen 2015a). It is important to note in this context that European integration started with solving security issues, too. The European Community of Coal and Steel (ECCS) was as much about containing post-World War II West Germany and providing security for its neighbours (France!) as it was about economic cooperation. Conveniently, Moravcsik's historical and liberal intergovernmentalist account starts with the Treaty of Rome rather than with the ECCS (Moravcsik 1998).

Functional theories of regional integration appear to do a reasonably good job at accounting for regional cooperation and integration in six of eight world regions. Yet, they fail with regard to both North America and Northeast Asia, the latter being the economically most dynamic region of the world. With regard to NAFTA, the low level of regional integration and the lack of WTO+ dispute settlement systems (see Alter/Hooghe 2016) are inconsistent with the degree of economic interdependence in this part of the world. Concerning Northeast Asia, things are even more puzzling against the backdrop of functional theories of cooperation and integration. Not only is Northeast Asia among the economically most interdependent regions of the world (second only to the EU region). There exists also one of the most acute security dilemmas of the world (e.g. the dispute over islands in the South and East China seas, the North Korean nuclear build-up). If security interdependence explains regional integration in Sub-Saharan Africa, it should do even more so in Northeast Asia. Yet, we observe an almost complete lack of formal institutions to deal with interdependence conflicts – be they economic or security-related – in this part of the world.

Governance approaches can help overcome the statist and formal institutionalist bias of major European integration theories thereby strengthening their explanatory power (Börzel 2016c). Governance gives equal status to state and non-state actors and does not prioritize formal over informal institutions. By avoiding to privilege either the state or formal institutions, governance approaches provide a “framework that can address the complexity of regional organizations/regionalism and at the same time transcend the case of Europe/EU itself” which scholars of both EU studies and new regionalism have called for (Söderbaum/Sbragia 2010: 568; Söderbaum 2016). It equally captures varieties of regionalism in areas where the capacity of the state to set and enforce is limited, civil society is weakly institutionalized, and neither state nor market actors are constrained by effective rule of law. For instance, informal practices of rent-seeking policies offer a compelling explanation for the “Spaghetti Bowl” of overlapping, often ineffective regional organizations in Sub-Sahara Africa (Söderbaum 2012). Strong networks of informal cooperation among business actors may also explain why no strong formal institutions have emerged in Northeast Asia (Katzenstein/Shiraishi 1997).

Social constructivists have offered their own account for the lack of formal institutions of regional integration in Asia. Constructivist approaches put norms, identities, and discourses as ideational drivers of regionalism at center stage (Risse forthcoming). Long before the constructivist turn in International Relations (Adler 2013), transactionalism argued that successful integration requires a sense of community (Deutsch et al. 1957; Adler/Barnett 1998; Acharya 2001). It is unclear, however, whether collective identity is a precondition for or rather an



indicator of regional integration and whether there are any causal effects one way or the other (Checkel 2016).

Cultural differences and collective identities – the “Asian way” – have been invoked to explain the reluctance of Asian states to engage in the building of strong regional institutions (Acharya 2004; Katzenstein 2005; Nesadurai 2009). Yet, these cultural explanations have an essentialist flavour to it and overlook that regions are not “cultural containers,” but that cultural influences have been flowing back and forth in time and space. Moreover, African and Latin American countries share some of the cultural traits of their Asian counterparts, such as the (post-)colonial experience, which are supposed to render them more sensitive about their national sovereignty. Yet, while regionalism in Asia and Latin America is about protecting sovereignty, African states have been willing to pool and delegate their sovereignty at the regional level to an extent that goes at times beyond the European Union. Moreover and despite the “Asian way” rhetoric, Southeast Asia and ASEAN have gradually moved forward toward formal regional institution-building thereby “copying and pasting” those elements of EU institutions which have been deemed suitable for the region (Jetschke/Katada 2016; Jetschke/Murray 2012). It remains puzzling, though, why Northeast Asia has not moved along a similar path with scholars giving different answers (Hemmer/Katzenstein 2002; Jones/Smith 2007; Acharya 2011; Dent 2012).

In sum, functional theories of regional cooperation and integration – whether federalism, liberal intergovernmentalism, or neofunctionalism (see Kelemen forthcoming, Moravcsik/Schimmelfennig forthcoming, as well as Niemann et al. forthcoming) – offer a surprisingly plausible account of regionalism beyond Europe, once one adds security concerns and “regime boosting” to the list of reasons why states engage in regional cooperation and integration. Historical institutionalism (Pollack forthcoming), governance approaches (Börzel forthcoming) and social constructivism (Risse forthcoming) complement these explanations through their emphasis on path dependent processes, informal institutions and non-state actors, on the one hand, and community-building (or the lack thereof), on the other. Once regions are set on a path toward integration, they very rarely reverse course and is often sustained by informal institutions, as region-building in Latin America, Eurasia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Southeast Asia demonstrate. In contrast, lack of collective identity might be able to explain why North America and Northeast Asia are not inclined to engage in “incomplete contracting” through multi-purpose regional institutions, since these could not survive without some sense of community, at least among the social, economic, and political elites (Marks et al. 2013).

This brings us to our last point with regard to comparative regionalism. Figure 1 above represents a one-time picture of the current situation with regard to regional orders. However, if we consider developments over time, we can observe that the number of new regional organizations has not only increased over the past 30 years; already existing forms of regionalism have deepened and broadened (cf. Börzel/Risse 2016a: Chapters 14-21). Major regional organizations outside Europe, including the Arab League, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and Mercosur, aspired to deeper forms of trade and monetary integration. They have also taken on new tasks in the realm of external and internal security, dealing with issues such as nuclear nonproliferation, disarmament, territorial disputes, domestic political stability, migration, terrorism, or human trafficking. Interestingly, states have been more willing to delegate political authority, e.g., to regional courts, than to pool it (Lenz/Marks 2016). At the same time, they have agreed to formalize decision-making procedures, opening them, albeit reluctantly, for majority decisions and parliamentary representation.



While the EU is still in a league of its own, the broadening and deepening of regionalism elsewhere, has made it less unique and more comparable. Integration theories have little difficulty explaining why regionalism emerges in the first place. Their main challenge is to explain why regionalism in some parts of the world, policy sectors, or times involves more or less integration. The various approaches have one major shortcoming in common: They all assume independent decision-making. Regional cooperation and integration are conceptualized as reactions to some problems in the region itself. Yet, regions do not exist in splendid isolation from each other. What if regional integration in one part of the world sparks similar attempts in other regions? Diffusion approaches theorize how regional institutions spread across continents (Risse 2016). As Katzenstein has argued, for example, regional institution-building forms part of a global script diffusing around the world (Katzenstein 2005). Moreover, regional organizations and their member states seeking particular institutional solutions seem to adopt designs which they consider legitimate. ASEAN is a case in point (Jetschke/Murray 2012). The need for international legitimacy motivated ASEAN to set up a dispute settlement mechanism. Emulation has also driven the recent deepening and broadening of ASEAN, whose new Charter bears some striking resemblance with EU institutions (Jetschke 2010; Katsumata 2009). Likewise, ECOWAS, the Economic Community of West African States, might be following a global script that entails the establishment of certain regional institutions and for which the EU provides a reference model (Koitsch 2012).

If we focus on such “recipient driven” diffusion mechanisms (Risse 2016), we can also explain more easily why we observe not much institutional convergence. Regional organizations tend to adopt particular institutional designs in a selective manner. The principle of parliamentary assemblies attached to regional organizations, for instance, has been diffused widely (Rittberger/Schroeder 2016), but the European Parliament as a supranational and directly elected parliament with increasing decision-making power remains a rare exception. While ASEAN emulated the EU Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER), it made sure that this did not lead to a pooling of decision-making power, which would have violated the sovereignty principle. In other words, cognitive and normative priors within a region are key to understand the selective adaptation of specific institutional models and the resulting behavioural practices (Acharya 2004, 2009; Checkel 2001). Thus, localization resulting in selective adaptation of institutional scripts seems to be the rule of the game (Acharya 2004; cf. Börzel/van Hüllen 2015b). We observe very little mimicry in terms of the full-scale download of particular institutional solutions from some global script.

In sum, diffusion makes it abundantly clear that regions do not exist in splendid isolation of each other. We must not fall prone to “methodological regionalism” by assuming “relatively homogeneous, delineated, mutually exclusive, ‘natural’ world regions” (Holbig 2015: 12). There is ample evidence of interaction, mutual entanglement and diffusion processes (Risse 2016). Diffusion theories allow capturing the interconnectedness of regions.

- Theories of European integration travel well to other regions. They offer plausible accounts of regionalism beyond Europe.
- The broadening and deepening of regionalism around the world have made the EU less unique and more comparable.
- The main challenge for theories of European integration is to explain why regionalism in some parts of the world, policy sectors, or times involves more or less integration.

### 3. Conclusions

In this paper, we have adopted two tests for various theories of European integration. The first is whether they are able not only to explain integration, but also crises and dis-integration in the EU. European integration theories pass this first test with flying colors. However, we have to admit that this first test primarily refers to explanations with regard to the various crises, which the EU currently faces – from the Euro crisis to the migration challenges and Brexit. The various theories of European integration can indeed account for these crises. As to dis-integration, we have yet to see reversals of European integration. In contrast to what some scholars argue, the various crises have resulted in further integration steps (Euro crisis), stagnation and widespread non-compliance (migration challenges), and – interestingly enough – again further integration (Brexit, namely with regard to EU defense policies). There has been no dis-integration so far. Thus, we simply do not know whether the various integration theories pass this litmus test.

The second test for the various integration theories is whether they are able to travel beyond the European experience. The field of comparative regionalism is currently blooming (overview in (Börzel/Risse 2016a)) and we have to ask whether European integration theories have any purchase with regard to the increasing efforts at regional cooperation and integration across the world. Here, the answer appears to be “yes, but.” As we have argued above, functional theories of cooperation and integration – such as federalism, liberal intergovernmentalism, and neofunctionalism (see Kelemen forthcoming, Moravcsik/Schimmelfennig, as well as Niemann et al. forthcoming) – are able to account for regional integration – or lack thereof – in many parts of the world. But we have to amend them beyond economic interdependence as enabling condition and include security interdependence (e.g. in Sub-Sahara Africa) as well as the survival interests of regimes, both democratic (Latin America) and authoritarian (Eurasia). Historical institutionalism (Pollack forthcoming), governance approaches (Börzel forthcoming) and social constructivism with a focus on collective identities and community-building (Risse forthcoming) add to these accounts.

However, there are two glaring exceptions. European integration theories hardly offer satisfactory accounts for the lack of regional integration in North America and Northeast Asia despite very high levels of economic interdependence, together with a strong security dilemma (in Northeast Asia) with a potential of seriously interrupting economic exchanges in the case of crisis or war. The functional theories of integration presented in this paper simply mispredict the outcome in these two regions. Moreover, a common weakness of all theories is their neglect of informal institutions and diffusion effects. Theories of integration tend to assume that regionalism is about formal institution-building that develops in splendid isolation and that regional as well as national actors do not look beyond their particular part of the world and do not emulate institutional designs. In contrast, diffusion approaches offer a plausible account why regional cooperation and integration have spread around the world – as long as we do not expect institutional convergence, but selective adaptation of institutional designs and localization.

In sum, we opt for comparative regionalism as a strong litmus test for integration theories, since it helps to overcome the Euro-centrism of earlier scholarship (Acharya 2016). As a result, it has become an empirical question rather than a battleground for ontological or epistemological differences whether theories originally developed to account for the European experience travel to other world regions.

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